UNITED STATES BUREAU OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL PUBLICATION - - - - - - - WHOLE NUMBER 501

AN EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

IN REGARD TO

"A CLASSIFICATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES WITH REFERENCE TO BACHELOR'S DEGREES"

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WASHINGTON
1912

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

AN EXPLANATORY STATEMENT IN REGARD TO "A CLASSIFICATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES WITH REFERENCE TO BACHELOR'S DEGREES."

According to returns made to the United States Bureau of Education for the year 1910–11, there were in that year in the universities and technological schools of this country 10,858 students doing graduate work. Of these, 8,369, or 77 per cent, were enrolled in 25 institutions, and 9 other institutions enrolled 539, or 5 per cent of the total. Thus 82 per cent of all the graduate students in the country were enrolled in 34 institutions, and only 18 per cent in the remaining 568 institutions reporting to this bureau. The number of graduate students is rapidly increasing. And since the cost of equipment and teaching force for effective graduate work is comparatively very great, the concentration of work of this kind in a few of the richer institutions will doubtless increase rapidly from year to year. In the same year several thousand other students were enrolled in the professional schools whose standards of admission require the bachelor's degree from a standard college, or the completion of some definite portion of the work required for graduation in the same. These thousands of graduate students and students with advanced standing in academic and professional schools come from four or five hundred colleges, old and new, large and small, public and private, rich and poor, in all parts of the country and with standards varying as widely as the conditions under which they work and the needs of the people they serve.

The deans and other responsible officers of the graduate and professional schools naturally wish to deal justly with the large numbers of students applying annually for admission, and at the same time to maintain their own standards. But, from the very nature of the case, they can not examine students applying for admission as a child is examined for admission to a grade in an elementary school, nor can any one officer hope to know accurately the character of work done in each of the hundred or more colleges and schools from which men and women come seeking admission as graduate students to work for advanced academic or professional degrees. The few colleges from which students come to his institution in considerable

numbers several years in succession he may soon know sufficiently well to enable him to evaluate their work with some degree of accuracy and to deal with their graduates intelligently and for the best interests both of the students and of the institution which he represents and for the maintenance of whose standards he is responsible. For an evaluation of the work of other colleges from which students come intermittently and in small numbers, he must depend on officers in schools to which more of their graduate students go, or on the judgment of disinterested persons more or less intimately acquainted with their work and standards. To the extent that such judgment is affected by the personal equation or is based on superficial or inadequate knowledge, it must of course be unsatisfactory. For these and other reasons, the deans of most of the larger graduate and professional schools have for several years held annual conferences, largely for the purpose of comparing notes and trying to arrive at some just conclusion as to the status to be given graduates of each of the several colleges from which graduate students come to their institutions in any considerable numbers.

Anyone at all familiar with this problem must understand its importance, and it is easy to see that important economies of colleges and of graduate and professional schools alike, as well as vital interests of the students, depend on its solution. For any adequate solution there is need of some accurate information in regard to the equipment, work, and standards of the colleges, just as the colleges themselves desire, need, and obtain information in regard to the equipment, work, and standards of the high schools and preparatory schools from which they draw their students.

At the conference of deans of the larger graduate and professional schools held at the University of Virginia in 1910 this question came up for special consideration, and it was decided to undertake to collect such definite information about all colleges sending considerable numbers of students on for advanced work as would enable the responsible officers of the graduate and professional schools to deal intelligently and justly with their students and at the same time protect themselves against the false representations sometimes made by students in regard to standing offered them in other graduate and professional schools.

Two methods of arriving at the desired results were possible: To appoint a committee of their own number to undertake the work, or to obtain the services of some competent and disinterested outside persons or agency. The first course was open to the objection that the judgment of any committee composed of deans or other officers of graduate and professional schools might be suspected of being influenced too much by the experiences and practices of the particular institutions from which they might be chosen. An appeal was there-

fore made to the United States Bureau of Education to undertake this work, in the belief that it could be done here more accurately and more acceptably than anywhere else. Dr. Brown, at that time Commissioner of Education, recognized the magnitude and difficulty of the task, but he also foresaw the good results that must come from having it well done. Therefore, after careful consideration, he agreed to have the work done by this bureau and assigned it to Dr. Kendric C. Babcock, who had recently come to the bureau as specialist in higher education. It was easily apparent that this work would require much time, skill, and patience, and that it must reach even a tentative conclusion through several stages following upon one another at rather long intervals. It was hoped, however, that the work might be allowed to proceed without undue exploitation of the earlier and necessarily imperfect results.

The enormous task of visiting and examining all the colleges concerned was clearly out of question. It could not be done in any reasonable time. Evidently, therefore, the first step was to find as nearly as possible the common or average practice of the graduate and professional schools in dealing with students coming from each of the more important colleges and to correct this by a careful study of the experiences of each of the larger graduate and professional schools with students coming from colleges within its own particular sphere and of whose work and standards its officers might well be supposed to have more accurate knowledge than the officers of other institutions could have. Each large graduate or professional school has such a sphere, which includes a larger or smaller group of colleges the majority of whose students desiring to do advanced work come to it. Its officers therefore are soon possessed of knowledge about these colleges which can not fail to be helpful to the officers of all other graduate or professional schools at which any of the students of these colleges seek admission.

By finding and making known to each of the graduate and professional schools the average practice of all, and to all the more intelligent practice of each in regard to the students of colleges in its own immediate and particular sphere, it was hoped that at least the most obvious errors in dealing with advanced and graduate students might be eliminated. This Dr. Babcock undertook to do. He visited as many of the graduate and professional schools as he could, consulted their deans and other responsible officers and examined their records of students. The information thus gained he supplemented by consulting the executive officers of all or most of the large educational boards in regard to the institutions of learning best known to them, by conference with State officers and by interviews with presidents and deans of State universities as to their experience with graduate students coming to them from other colleges in their re-

spective States. Reliance was also placed upon the somewhat full and accurate information which this bureau has of many of the colleges in all parts of the country, some of which have made marked improvement in standards and work so recently that these improvements have not yet been fully recognized even by the graduate and professional schools with which they have the closest relations. With a later stage of the work in mind, Dr. Babcock visited as many colleges as he could conveniently in connection with the performance of other duties, but none of these was examined with the purpose of making a personal and final evaluation of its work as a whole.

After 10 months of careful investigation of the kind above indicated, Dr. Babcock made a tentative grouping of 344 colleges, only a little more than half the number reporting to this bureau, but a much larger proportion of those sending graduates on for advanced work. The list was confessedly incomplete and the grouping only tentative.

"Institutions whose graduates would," according to his findings, "ordinarily be able to take the master's degree at any of the large graduate schools in one year after receiving the bachelor's degree, without necessarily doing more than the amount of work regularly prescribed for such higher degree," were listed in the first group, which contained the names of 59 colleges.

"Institutions whose graduates would probably require for the master's degree in one of the strong graduate schools somewhat more than one year's regular graduate work * * * a differential which might be represented by one or two extra year courses, by one or more summer school sessions, or by a fourth or fifth quarter" were placed in the second group, which contained the names of 161 colleges. "In accordance with the practice of some graduate schools" Dr. Babcock found "a brilliant student with a brilliant record from the strong institutions in this class might be admitted probationally to regular candidacy, and if he gave satisfactory evidence of his ability to do the prescribed work during the first term or semester he might be given an individual rerating in the middle of the year and be granted the higher degree on the completion of the regular minimum amount of work." The colleges in this list to which this practice seemed to apply were starred. Of these there were 44. This gives a total of 103 colleges whose better students may, according to this finding, hope to make the master's degree in one year without doing more than the usual amount of work, and leaves 117 whose students must to obtain this degree expect to do something more than the minimum amount of work required.

"Institutions whose standards of admission and graduation are so low, or so uncertain, or so loosely administered as to make the requirement of two years for the master's degree probable" were placed in the third class, which contained the names of 84 colleges.

" Institutions whose bachelor's degree would be approximately two years short of equivalency of the standard bachelor's degree of a standard college " were placed in the fourth group, which contained the names of 40 colleges. A " standard college " was interpreted as being " one requiring the usual four years of high-school work or at least 14 units for admission and four years of well-distributed college work for graduation, in charge of a competent faculty of not less than six persons giving their whole time to college work."

" The rating of institutions in this classification is based upon the course which might be followed by an ambitious student proceeding under normal conditions: (1) An earnest student of good ability and health who has complied with the requirements for a bachelor's degree in a standard college. (2) Whose work includes a solid foundation for the courses which he desires to take for the advanced degree. (3) Who enters upon graduate work within a year or two after taking his bachelor's degree without intervening special study and without such advantages as might arise from teaching subjects of a special nature in high school or college, thereby making up in some part deficiencies in his college preparation for graduate work."

It is " assumed that the line of study pursued for the higher degree is closely allied to the work done as an undergraduate and not widely divergent, as would be the case for a graduate from a classical course desiring to take a master's degree in forestry " or civil engineering.

The tentative grouping made on this basis Dr. Babcock submitted to me for my inspection and approval. It seemed to be as accurate as could be made without the careful criticism of the officers of the graduate and professional schools on whose judgment and practice it was largely based. Since it would be easier for them to review it if presented in the form of a printed pamphlet rather than on multigraph sheets, as was at first suggested, I requested that it be printed and treated as a proof sheet until it might be revised in the light of their criticism. This was done, and 200 copies were delivered to the Bureau of Education, practically all of which were sent to the deans of the larger graduate and professional schools in the hope that their " frank and thoroughgoing criticism " might assist the bureau in its preparation of a larger and more correct list later. Through an an oversight the pamphlet was not marked " Proof—Confidential " as it should have been, and before the error was discovered the superintendent of documents had received copies of it for distribution to the depository libraries and for sale. This explains why the pamphlet does not have any serial number on it, nor any statement that it is a document of the United States Bureau of Education. The Bureau of Education does nothing which it wishes to conceal, but its work, like any other work, can not fairly be considered as complete when it has only been begun, and even a cursory reading

of this tentative statement could not fail to reveal the fact that it was not intended for general publication, and that any such use of it was not expected.

It seems also to have been unfortunate that the groups of colleges referred to above were designated as "Class 1," "Class 2," "Class 3," and "Class 4," and that the word "classification" appeared on the title-page, since these facts have given offense to some who have doubtlessly not read the full and specific statement that the classification is "with reference to bachelor's degrees" only, on the basis, and for the purpose, and from the information set forth above, and only tentative.

No attempt was made to classify colleges on the basis of their worth and merits as educational institutions founded and maintained to serve their constituencies according to their needs and conditions, nor did it have any intention of announcing "a judgment day for our colleges," or doing anything more than that which is clearly stated above. I know many colleges listed in the second, third, or fourth group which are serving their constituencies much better than they could if, in disregard of needs, conditions, and demands, they should raise their requirements for admission and graduation so as to put them into a higher group of this classification, made on the narrow basis of the rating of their bachelor's degrees as recorded at the graduate and professional schools. Neither can the place of any institution in this tentative group be legitimately used for advertising purposes unless accompanied by a clear statement of the purpose, method, and basis of the grouping and the statement that it is only tentative and confessedly imperfect.

What further has been done? What is the further intention of the Bureau of Education in this work? Briefly, as follows:

The generous criticisms and continued investigations of a year have indicated the desirability of making the grouping in a somewhat different form and the change of about a dozen colleges to another group from that in which they were first placed. A revision of the original statement embodying these changes has been made and the galley proofs of it have been sent to the officers of the graduate and professional schools for further criticism. When these have been returned a revised statement, which will then show as clearly as possible, not the independent judgment of the Bureau of Education or of any of its employees, but mainly the practice of the graduate and professional schools in dealing with students holding the bachelor's degree from any of the several colleges listed and presenting themselves for professional or advanced work, will be issued as a confidential proof sheet and sent to the officers of the graduate and professional schools for such assistance as it can give them in this still imperfect and tentative stage, and to the presidents of the col-

leges listed for their information as to how these colleges are rated at the graduate and professional schools to which their students go for advanced work, and also for the frank criticism of these presidents and of the members of the faculties of their colleges. To have sent to these presidents or to the public press the first tentative statement before it could be corrected so as to show more accurately the practice of the graduate and professional schools would have been premature and unfair to graduate schools and colleges alike.

No doubt it will be discovered, when this revised statement comes into the hands of the presidents of the colleges listed in it, that the work and standards of many of them have not been correctly evaluated, and that there has been danger, at least, that their graduates would not be given the exact amount of credit they should receive when presenting themselves for advanced work. That there has been such danger is well known, and this knowledge constituted the principal reason for undertaking this difficult and important task.

Upon request from the proper authorities of any college which seems to be rated too low or too high, the bureau will gladly undertake an examination of equipment, requirements, standards, and work and assist in any other way it can toward having the rating corrected, and it will issue new revisions of these proof sheets as often as may seem desirable. The number of men in the bureau who can give their time to this work is not sufficient to carry it forward as rapidly as we and all concerned would like, but possibly a way may be found by which competent assistance may be had, and no great harm can come from a reasonable delay if those interested will only take the trouble to inform themselves fully as to the nature and purpose of the work and then give such assistance as they can in carrying it forward. A delay of a few months, or a few years even, in the accomplishment of a task of this kind and magnitude is not so important as that it may finally be done honestly, faithfully, and intelligently.

There can be little doubt, on the other hand, that some colleges will find they have defects of which they have not been aware. The frank, but unbiased, criticism from the outside, which should be welcomed by all educational institutions, may reveal defects and weaknesses in equipment, requirements for admission, standards of graduation, organization, and teaching not realized by those charged with their government and conduct. Many of these will ask, as some have already done, that the bureau send some competent person to examine them thoroughly in the light of his broader knowledge of similar institutions in all parts of the country, point out frankly their particular defects, and offer such advice as he can for their improvement. The bureau will always respond to such a request to the extent of its ability, or perhaps expert and disinterested advice may

be obtained from other sources. In this way many colleges may easily be brought up to the desired standard, which their officers and supporters, in the fullness of love and zeal, supposed they had already attained.

Some colleges will say, no doubt, as they should, that they are less concerned about the standing of their few graduates who go elsewhere for advanced work than about meeting the obligations placed upon them by the needs of the people they serve or the educational conditions of the States or sections in which they are located. They will rightly choose rather to serve the purposes for which they were founded and are maintained, with low standards of admission and graduation, than to prove recreant to their trust by attempting to raise these standards prematurely. They will either ask to be removed from the list because of their disregard of all standards or to be retained because of their honest desire to have their standards and purposes known as they are.

Finally, it will be possible to publish to the world a statement of the standing of colleges in respect to the value of their bachelor's degrees, which will for the time be approximately complete and correct. No such statement can ever be final. It will need careful revision from year to year as new colleges come into existence and old ones go out of existence or change their standards through growth or decay. Such revision will, however, not be so difficult after an approximately correct statement of the standing of existing colleges has once been made.

Why should the Bureau of Education have undertaken this task, and having begun it, why continue it? What adequate results are to be expected? These questions have been partially answered already.

For one thing, when the work has been completed to the extent indicated above, or to a lesser degree even, there will no longer be the danger which now exists of unjust treatment of students from one college applying for admission for graduate or advanced work in another. It must be recognized and admitted that some of this danger arises from the natural tendency to overestimate the work of old, large, and wealthy institutions as compared with that of those which are younger, smaller, or less wealthy. Only a few days ago I was told of a student who, having received a bachelor's degree from a college well known and much honored in its section, applied for admission as a graduate student working for the master's degree in a university in another section, with the expectation of being able to do the work required in one year, or in two at most. This student, however, was informed that before she could be admitted to graduate work she would have to do two years' work for the bachelor's degree of that institution. I know both of these institutions and believe the average graduate of the first should be admitted to higher stand-

ing at the second than was granted this young woman, and that its standard and work are higher and better than the authorities of the second institution seem to think. If they are not, then the authorities of the first institution, its faculty and students, the people who support it, and the State it serves should know it.

Many colleges whose standards are low and whose work is not so good as it might be will, when they have become conscious of their defects, take delight in remedying them, and their supporters will find equal pleasure in providing the necessary funds to enable them to do better work and to attain the standards to which they, in their affection and pride, imagined they had already attained. With this raising of standards of the colleges there will come a general improvement in all the schools from which they draw students and the possibility of a better and a more thorough work in all the universities and professional schools to which they send their graduates.

Sooner or later, let us hope soon, colleges whose equipment, endowment, income, purpose, or constituency will not permit them to do more than two years of college work will frankly acknowledge it, deal honestly with themselves, their students, and the people who contribute to their support, cease to give for two years of college work degrees that are generally understood to be given only as a reward of four years of such work, or to spend unwisely the larger part of their income on a very few students in the higher classes to the neglect of much larger numbers in the lower classes, face their conditions and tasks frankly and do thoroughly and well the work they can and should do without undue temptation to deceive themselves, their students, those who contribute to their support, or the general public.

It will, I believe, also be possible, without increasing the danger of a deadening, mechanical uniformity, to so standardize the work of all our colleges that a year's work in any course at any college will mean practically the same as a year's work in the same course at any other college, and that students may go from one to another freely, receiving full credit for work done and without loss of time and progress. Such interchange of students is very desirable and for many reasons must become more general than it has been in the past.

Finally, more accurate information in regard to our colleges will be accessible to foreigners, and a more just rating of them by foreign universities to which our students go will be possible, both of which ends are to be desired, especially by the smaller colleges whose size and wealth are not such as to attract foreign attention but whose work may nevertheless be of the highest type.

These last three results are not to be hoped for immediately, nor do I believe they were foreseen clearly enough to be counted as

reasons for the beginning of this work which the Bureau of Education has undertaken. But that they may grow out of it, if the bureau can have for its completion the hearty cooperation of college men which it should have, seems quite possible. That it will have such cooperation when the nature and purpose of the work are fully understood, I firmly believe, for college men are honest, unselfish, and reasonable. It is their mission to find and teach the truth and their profession to do whatever they can for the good of all the people and for the sound advancement of the institutions by which the people are served. More than others they know that things are as they are and that no profit can come from any kind of deception, either of self or of others, that freedom comes from knowing the truth, and profit from its fearless and unselfish application.

The Bureau of Education has no selfish interest in this or any other work. It desires only to serve wisely and effectively. Having undertaken this task with a more or less full realization of its magnitude and difficulty and some understanding of its importance, it believes it would be open to the just accusation of recreancy to duty if it did not carry it forward faithfully toward completion. By doing this it seems quite certain it may fulfill a part of the high function for which it was established, viz, "for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories, and of diffusing such information * * * as shall aid the people of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient schools and school systems and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country."

P. P. Claxton,
Commissioner.

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